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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, June 7, 1938.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

SUBJECT: "INSECT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS." Information from the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Questions about insects are again filling up the week's mailbag. Letters from listeners are complaining about ants in the house, and fleas on the dog, about clothes moths in the closet and bedbugs -- well, you know what a bother insects can be. So once again, let's dedicate our question-and-answer day to fighting house pests.

First question. A housekeeper reports that small ants are overrunning her pantry. She wants to know whether a spray is useful in getting rid of them.

Dr. E. A. Back of the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine says that the ordinary kerosene-pyrethrum sprays commonly on the market are excellent for killing ants actually hit by the spray. But sprays are rarely a permanent cure because they don't kill the whole colony and new ants are likely to take the place of those that are killed. The only permanent cure is to trace the ants' line of march back to the nest and fumigate to get rid of the queen and the nest. This is sometimes difficult, however. So the next best cure probably is using sodium fluoride powder along window sills, drainboards, foundations, and other places where ants crawl. Sodium fluoride is a cheap and often very effective way to get rid of ants. BUT IT IS A POISON. SO TAKE CARE NOT TO GET IT INTO FOOD AND KEEP IT AWAY FROM CHILDREN AND PETS.

Other remedies for ants you will find discussed in a Department of Agriculture leaflet. Here's a useful publication for any home library -- Leaflet No. 147 called "House Ants." Dr. Back is the author. You can have a copy by writing to the Department of Agriculture in Washington, D. C. and asking for it. As long as the supply holds out, copies are free.

Now from ants let's turn to fleas.

"Is it true," asks a listener, "that fleas carry disease?"

Answer: According to Dr. F. C. Bishopp of the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, certain species of fleas that infest rats and other animals carry a number of serious diseases of man -- such diseases as bubonic plague and endemic typhus fever. They also help spread internal parasites of various kinds. So for reasons of health as well as comfort, it pays to keep your dog, cat, pig, and other domestic animals free of fleas.

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Another listener asks about the different kinds of fleas. She writes: "I always supposed that fleas lived by sucking the blood of animals or people. But my friends in California tell me of a 'sand flea' that breeds in the sand and has no relation to the usual biting fleas."

Answer: Dr. Bishopp says that all fleas require the blood of birds or animals to reproduce. He says that there is no true 'sand flea' that breeds in the sand and does not feed on animals.

There are many kinds of fleas, of course, and they have similar habits. But 3 kinds are the most serious pests of man in this country -- the dog flea, the cat flea, and the human flea. (In the South the sticktight flea annoys poultry and occasionally human beings also.) The dog and cat fleas look very much alike and feed on both dogs and cats. They are the fleas that get into homes in the East and become such a nuisance. As for the human flea, that may live on many different animals. Often it lives on pigs and breeds in pig sties. It also lives on dogs and cats, and on wild animals like badgers and skunks. This is the flea people complain about in the Mississippi Valley, in Texas, and westward to the Pacific Coast.

Now about the remedies for fleas. Dr. Bishopp says that you can keep dogs and cats practically free of fleas if you occasionally apply derris powder next to the skin along the back and neck of your pets and on top of the head. If you let your animals run free, repeat this treatment every 2 weeks. A level teaspoonful of derris powder is enough to kill every flea on a large dog. Derris kills slowly so don't expect to see the fleas drop off immediately after you powder your dog. You can also use pyrethrum powder. Neither derris nor pyrethrum are poisonous to domestic animals. Dr. Bishopp says that cats which have licked the powder off their fur sometimes are made slightly ill but suffer no permanent injury.

As for getting rid of fleas in houses or outbuildings, cheap creosote oil is a good remedy for basements, beneath buildings or porches, or in other sleeping places of animals. But because creosote oil will burn animals and plants, has an unpleasant odor and makes a bad stain, it can't be used everywhere. In the house, sprays and naphthalene flakes do the job. Naphthalene flakes scattered over the floor of infested rooms at the rate of 5 pounds per room will kill fleas if you keep the rooms closed for a couple of days. Then, a commercial insect spray will help get rid of occasional fleas carried into living rooms.

All this information and more is in Dr. Bishopp's recent leaflet called "How to Control Fleas." "How to Control Fleas" is Leaflet No. 152, and you get a copy by writing to the Department of Agriculture in Washington, D. C. for it.

Last question: "What is the best all-round cockroach remedy?" Answer: Sodium fluoride powder which I mentioned as a good remedy for ants. Sodium fluoride is the base of most effective roach powders that sell under various brand names. But again, remember that it is a poison. Keep it away from food, from children and pets. Apply it in the evening just before the roaches come out for their nightly feasts. Sprinkle it along the back of shelves, drainboards and so on where the roaches run. Leave it for 2 or 3 days and then repeat at intervals of a week or two until all the insects disappear. ----- Listeners troubled by cockroaches are also welcome to a leaflet -- the leaflet called "Cockroaches and Their Control," No. 144. Department of Agriculture entomologists have prepared all these insect leaflets to help you solve your problems with household pests. So you may feel free to write for them.

